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AFRICAN HOUSEHOLD SURVEY CAPABILITY PROGRAMME: SELECTED ISSUES AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

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APPENDIX I: SUMMARY OF NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS CONDUCTED IN AHSCP COUNTRIES IN 1986 AND 1987

INTRODUCTION

1. The African Household Survey Capability Programme (AHSCP), which is a regional component of the global National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP), was established in 1978 to improve the availability of continuing, timely and integrated data in African countries. These data are required to ensure the adequate preparation and monitoring of national and regional plans, policies and programmes.

2. The regional team of AHSCP at the ECA provides expert advice and assistance to countries in the African region in the development, implementation and dissemination of household surveys, and is intended to strengthen the permanent household survey capability in each country.

3. At the beginning of 1988, there were three regional advisers based in the Economic Commission for Africa as follows:
(a) one financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the integrated project entitled Statistical Development Programme for Africa (SDPA);
(b) one provided by the International Labour Office for assistance with surveys of the economically active population and of household income and expenditure; and
(c) the third one provided by the Government of the Federal Government of Germany for assistance with data processing of household surveys.

4. The regional advisory services are available on request to all countries in the African region and are not restricted only to countries involved in the AHSCP, although priority is given to the latter.

5. As at the end of 1987, twenty countries are recorded as participating in the AHSCP as follows:
Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Project proposals have also been formulated recently for Cote d'Ivoire which is already carrying out a series of Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS) with the support of the World Bank.

6. In addition, countries such as Cape Verde, Djibouti, Mauritius, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tunisia, Uganda and Zaire were planning or undertaking household surveys without having continuous survey programmes within the framework of AHSCP.

7. Appendix 1 lists household surveys conducted by AHSCP countries since the last Joint Conference in March 1986.

8. The main purpose of this paper is to outline some of the issues which have been perceived in recent years under the AHSCP. Three main areas are considered in this paper:

(a) Problems existing in various African countries;

(b) The coordination of international aid and whether that aid is appropriate; and

(c) Whether assistance by AHSCP advisers addresses the long term capabilities of each country or merely solves short term problems.

PROBLEMS AFFECTING HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

9. Some African countries experience problems in developing and implementing household surveys. For ease of presentation, this paper considers the problems being encountered at each phase of survey development and implementation.

Project formulation

10. Statistical agencies are not always fully informed as to user needs and priorities, and therefore may have some difficulty in establishing the need for and content of a household survey programme.

11. It is important that statistical agencies keep themselves informed of, and indeed anticipate, user needs and priorities. Some countries in the African region achieve this through national statistical advisory committees. These types of committees may not be successful, especially if the committee members do not represent a fair balance of user types, or if some users are unable to articulate their needs. Nevertheless, in general, some formal committee mechanism is recommended.

12. At the same time, statisticians need to develop the skills to anticipate and interpret the data requirements of users in their country through less formal methods, and this is made easier if statisticians establish a close working relationship with their potential users. This relationship may be encouraged by having statistical officers "out-posted" to major government ministries.

13. Knowledge of the current or anticipated needs of users will facilitate the formulation of the most efficient statistical programme for a given country, and this programme would normally include some household surveys.

14. It has been noted that some countries attempt a survey programme which is too ambitious, and eventually must abandon all or part of that programme. Some countries also over-burden particular surveys with too many questions.

15. The ECA can assist in the formulation of household survey programmes. During 1986 and 1987, the ECA, in conjunction with the NHSCP Central Coordinating Unit of the United Nations Statistical Office (UNSO), Food and Agricultural Organisation

(FAO) and International Labour Office (ILO), assisted in the formulation of household survey programmes in several countries. During these missions, knowledge of national priorities and user needs was essential, and required visits to selected major users.

Finance

16. Many African countries have problems in financing their programme of household surveys. In fact, several of the countries for which AHSCP project proposals were formulated some years ago have not commenced the programme of surveys due to lack of funding. These include Congo, Egypt, Senegal, Sudan and Tanzania.

17. Limited foreign currency within the country may prevent the purchase of new vehicles, spare parts, computer equipment and so on, and foreign assistance is frequently sought. The UNECA is not a UN funding agency and cannot assist in this field, other than in recommending various funding sources.

18. Some countries have also reported that funds in local currency are not available for salaries, stationery and other survey consumables. One would expect that a government should be able to pay for local costs if the survey programme is important enough to be given high priority. In addition, international donor agencies do not generally provide funds for local costs, although in exceptional circumstances (such as severe economic situations), local costs may be funded.

Human resources

19. Another problem faced by many countries in Africa relates to the availability of human resources with adequate knowledge, experience and skill to design, implement and analyse household surveys.

20. Human resources are required as follows:

(a) Staff to plan and manage the project;

(b) Statisticians able to understand user needs and to transform these into a workable set of concepts and questionnaires;

(c) Operations specialists, including sampling specialists, to organise and supervise the data collection phase of the survey;

(d) Data processing system analysts to efficiently convert the raw collected data into the specified set of tabulations, and

(e) Subject matter specialists to analyse and interpret the results for dissemination.

21. These sorts of skills are not always available in African countries. Many countries use international funding for overseas training, but in a number of cases the newly trained staff members leave for the private sector. Many trained statisticians are also transferred or promoted to other areas within the public service without fully using their skills.

22. Local training should be encouraged wherever possible, and part-time training is particularly suitable so that the trainee acquires practical experience while being trained.

23. Many countries have statisticians with excellent paper qualifications, but only limited experience. There is a need to encourage young graduates to obtain more on-the-job experience instead of seeking post-graduate studies.

24. The UNECA regional advisory service assists with solutions to these problems in several ways. Firstly, it provides short (one to two weeks) working group meetings and training courses with a view to expanding on the skills and experience of African statisticians, data processors, etc.

25. Secondly, the regional advisers impart some of their experience and skills to national staff during problem solving missions. Missions especially concentrating on training matters are also undertaken.

26. Consultants are also used occasionally for these tasks, although it must be added that consultancy funds are limited.

27. Despite these various forms of assistance in training, it is felt that the AHSCP could provide more assistance in this field. This point is dealt with in more detail later in this paper.

Project planning and management

28. Some countries have difficulties in adequately planning and managing their household survey programmes. Attention needs to be given to the scheduling of activities, allocation of available resources, setting of milestones, project monitoring, and so on.

29. The UNECA also assists in minimising this problem. Working group meetings are organised periodically on organisation, content and methodology of household surveys. Seven of such meetings have been held in the 1980's. In November 1987, with the financial support of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, the UNECA carried out separate Working Group meetings for francophone and anglophone countries on household surveys (with special emphasis on data processing).

30. As appropriate, the regional advisers also provide guidance on project planning and management during their missions.

Questionnaire content and design

31. Some countries have requested UNECA assistance in the design of survey questionnaires. This is a difficult task requiring skill and experience which (as mentioned) is not always available in the country. Particular problems have been met in questionnaires which are too long or too complex, with questions which are not clear or concise, and also with questionnaires which are difficult to process.

32. It is necessary to ensure that survey questionnaires are easy to complete and process, and that they contain the minimum set of questions to satisfy user needs.

Data processing

33. Data processing has often been the cause of substantial delays in the release of household survey results. These problems may have arisen because of inadequacies in questionnaire design, project planning, availability of resources, improper coding, incompatibilities in computer equipment, etc.

34. Whatever the cause, it is recommended that data processing must be planned and designed early in a household survey project. The most timely survey results now being produced in Africa are the result of having a tested and operational data processing system available before data collection started.

35. As already mentioned, the UNECA recently carried out working group meetings specifically aimed at the data processing of household surveys. The UNECA and ILO also have regional advisers who assist in this aspect of household survey operations.

Tabulation, analysis and report writing

36. A further problem encountered by some countries in Africa relates to the experience and knowledge to extract and disseminate information from their household surveys.

37. The choice of tables and the appropriate analysis of the data in these tables has been an area in which the UNECA has provided assistance.

38. In addition, the skills required for determining the content and structure of a survey report, the ability to express the report in a language which is rarely the mother tongue of the writer, and the finance to print the report have all been identified as problems in the output phase of household survey programmes.

Statistical integration

39. Finally under the heading of general country problems, there is the major issue of statistical integration. Household surveys

should be integrated in at least two ways - with other household surveys in the programme and with other information sources in the country.

40. The African Household Survey Capability Programme aims to promote the integration of survey concepts, classifications, sampling frames, etc in order that the results from each survey can be more easily related to other household surveys in the survey programme.

41. Many countries in Africa have adopted this approach and have appreciated the savings in resources as well as the improvements for users.

42. At the same time, household surveys should also be seen as part of the overall information set for each country. The statistical programme needs to be developed in such a way that the results of different statistical collections and compilations can be related one to another. This is achieved through standardised concepts, definitions, statistical units, classifications, etc.

43. The AHSCP advisory team attempts to promote this approach during their missions.

INTERNATIONAL AID

44. The second major topic considered in this paper concerns the coordination and appropriateness of international aid in the field of household surveys.

45. A diverse number of countries and international agencies give aid for the development and implementation of household surveys in African countries. There seems to be a need to ensure that this aid is well coordinated within each country.

46. For example, one country in southern Africa has received bilateral computing assistance for use as part of its programme of surveys, but has found that the machines provided in that aid have not been compatible with computers already available in the country or those provided by other sources. As a result, the survey data processing and tabulation in that country has been suspended until the incompatibility has been overcome.

47. In another example, the World Bank has implemented a series of Living Standard Measurement Surveys (LSMS) in several countries, and Ghana has incorporated such a survey into their Ghana Household Survey Programme. In 1986, the Ghana plan was to undertake the LSMS survey for one year then to carry out more traditional AHSCP surveys before, perhaps, either returning to the LSMS approach or repeating the cycle. The survey programme was likely to be amended during implementation.

48. At the more general level, the overall degree of coordination and integration between the LSMS programme and the AHSCP programme has yet to be determined, perhaps at an international expert meeting.

PERFORMANCE OF THE AHSCP ADVISORY SERVICE

49. The final major issue raised in this paper relates to whether the AHSCP advisory service is merely solving short term problems in each country or whether it is addressing the long term capability for carrying out household surveys.

50. As explained earlier, the AHSCP provides advisory services and consultancies covering a wide range of topics. This service is available on request to any country in the African region, and naturally only tends to be used when a problem arises.

51. It is believed that this "problem-solving" service has been useful, and will probably continue to be useful and desirable to overcome short term deficiencies in the region.

52. In addition, as also previously mentioned, the AHSCP carries out a number of working group meetings, workshops and a similar meetings which involve a training component.

53. However, it is considered that the long term capabilities in each country will be more effectively addressed if a more intensive training programme was undertaken.

54. It is suggested that the NHSCP and AHSCP programmes should provide more in-country and sub-regional training covering the various aspects of household survey programmes. It is proposed that UNECA sets up training modules and programmes initially for use by regional advisers and later for repeated training within each country by local staff. These training courses should aim at increasing the number of local staff with the knowledge and skills to undertake household surveys in their country.

CONCLUSION

55. This paper has attempted to list a number of issues and problem areas relating to the development of the AHSCP. Efforts will be made to assist countries which have encountered difficulties in order to enable them to start or re-activate their household survey programmes. It is expected that two additional countries may join AHSCP each year during the period 1988-1991, and assistance should also be provided to such countries.

56. It should be pointed out that some countries such as Mauritius, Seychelles, Swaziland and Tunisia already undertake household surveys at fairly regular intervals and could be considered as participating in the AHSCP provided that the issue of integration indicated in paragraphs 39 to 43 above receives adequate treatment. The ECA household surveys advisory team

would be prepared to assist these countries in looking into this matter.

57. The role of training in the development of the NHSCP and AHSCP programmes has been emphasised in order to build up effectively the capability of countries in planning and conducting household surveys, as well as in the processing, analysis and dissemination of the results.

SUMMARY OF NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS CONDUCTED IN AFSCP COUNTRIES IN 1986 AND 1987

(As at December 1987)

NOTE: The following summaries are based on information available to the ECA Statistics Division, and may be out of date. Countries have been previously requested to keep the ECA and UNSO informed on progress in the survey programmes, but some data may be out of date. If so, countries are requested to advise the ECA Statistics Division of any additional or amended information.

COUNTRY	SURVEY(a)	YEAR	CURRENT STATUS
Benin	HIES	1986-87	Being processed.
Botswana	HIES	1985-86	Results expected 1988.
	DEMOG	1987-88	Under collection.
Cote d'Ivoire	LSMS	On-going	Some results available.
Egypt	LFS	On-going	Not known.
Ghana	LSMS	1987-88	Under collection.
Kenya	LFS	1986 Urban	Preliminary results produced.
Lesotho	LFS	1985-86	Being processed.
	HIES	1986-87	Being processed.
Morocco	DEMOG/HLTH	1987	Preliminary results published.
Mali	DEMOG/HLTH	1987	Results expected shortly.
Nigeria	DEMOG	On-going	1984/85 report latest available
	LFS	On-going	1985 results published.
	HIES	1985-86	Not known.
Senegal	DEMOG/HLTH	1986	Preliminary report published.
Zambia	LFS	1st phase,1986	Report under review.
	LFS/DEMOG	2nd phase,1987	Being processed.
Zimbabwe	HIES	1985-86	Tabulation in progress.
	LFS	1986	Being processed.
	LIT	1986	Report expected shortly.

(a) Survey titles are summarised as follows -
- LFS ... Labour Force Survey
- HIES .. Household Income and Expenditure Survey
- DEMOG . Demographic Survey
- HLTH .. Health or Nutrition Survey
- LIT ... Literacy Survey
- LSMS .. Living Standards Measurement Survey (World Bank)